

March 17, 2009

Dear Chairman Steinbeisser and Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee,

My name is Jacob Cowgill and I am a farmer in Conrad, Montana. I wish I could have attended the hearing for HB445, but I am in Washington, DC as part of a national group of farmers, ranchers, sustainable food proponents, and rural advocates. I am visiting with my representatives about important Farm Bill programs and rural health care issues that will help strengthen rural Montana communities.

My wife and I were born and raised in Montana and we have seen some unfortunate changes to our rural communities. In my 31 years, I have seen my home town of Sand Coulee shrink to almost nothing. Courtney, my wife, has seen her town of Dutton depopulate, while farm families leave and local businesses close down.

Farmers are struggling to make ends meet, their kids aren't coming back to work their place, and potential new farmers aren't entering into the lifestyle because too many obstacles are in their way. Farmers are in a unique situation where their job is to provide something essential to the rest of the world - food - yet it is one of the most difficult occupations. I've chosen this lifestyle because I believe I am creating something better for our citizenry and communities. If I were to be accused of possessing patented seeds or plants, it would devastate my family both mentally and financially. I would not be able to afford to defend myself and I'm sure most other Montana farmers wouldn't be able to as well. It would end my dream to build a successful farm, leaving one less family on the land. With protection from liability if I inadvertently acquired patented seeds or was mistakenly blamed, any accusations could be reasonably addressed by the patent holders while protecting my property rights and keeping me on the land. Our farmers don't need any more obstacles thrown at them while they try to make a living and remain a vital part of the rural community they live in.

Rural Montanans are honest and trustworthy folks. They make the best neighbors - always there to help out when there's a need. They also value their property rights and respect others. This bill supports those rural Montanans and what they believe to be honest and fair, while respecting the advanced research being conducted in agriculture and the rights of patent holders.

I believe supporting this bill supports Montana farmers, their livelihoods, and rural communities across the state. Thank you for listening.

Sincerely your farmer,

Jacob Cowgill

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